

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, December 13, 1889, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Southern Pacific R.R. December 13, 1889. Dear Alec:

We have just breakfasted at Ashland and are entering on what the railway guide says is the finest scenery along this route, Mt. Shasta dominating over all. It cannot be more beautiful than the fertile valley through which we have lately been passing, are in their way. The calander says December but all around the country declares early spring. Exquisite rich fields of fresh green grass crossed and bounded by trim fences stretch in gentle undulating curves down towards the stream and then slowly up again over the crests of low hills upwards until they are lost in the powdery snow that lies lightly on the mountains which shut in the valley on either side. These beautiful trim fields with the constant variety of bits of wood low hills and different kinds of fences all in good order remind me somewhat of Southern France. We have left the fertile valleys behind and are up among the powdery snow mountains. The tall pines are exquisite in their snowy garb and sparkle in the warm sunshine. We are in a perfect wilderness of mountains among which the track winds and twists going ever higher. There is more variety in trees than we have seen since leaving home. Pines tall and slender have taken the place of the Oregon firs which they much resemble but there are plenty of other trees, oak and cottonwood, cedars and swell firs and others I know not but which are green still. The hills are falling back. While going ever higher we see hundreds of feet below us brown grass and meadow and ploughed lands, green, yellow and brown while we are up in the snow. Now we have been through a tunnel and retracing our steps are returning the way we came only about 299 feet 2 higher up the hillside. The fresh fallen snow is now six inches thick glistening in the sunlight. Here we are at Siskiyou station, it is the most wintry picture I have seen in years, buried in six inches of snow and trimmed with eighteen inch icicles, perfect fringes

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of them, this is 4135 feet high. It is not often one has such perfect days as this up here and even now the clouds are forming. Only tall pines are here bending beneath the snow. Alas for our hopes— Our two locomotives are pulling us in and out among the mountains and Mt. Shasta is close by but the clouds hide all except those immediately around us. Now and then a glimpse of deep blue sky or bright sunlight comes to cheer us with hopes I fear will prove deceptive. We are descending rapidly now, nearly below the snowline and traversing bare and barren looking valleys where only short grass and prickly bushes grow. It seems like a dream our journey among the wintry mountains the snow and ice and white pines. The clouds have settled down to a steady dull grey cutting all mountain tops above a certain line as with a knife and my hope of seeing this grand mountain has gone. Papa has made a list headed, Mountains seen, With Mabel, Without Mabel and below the first heading is one name Mt. Hood, below the other some dozen, I think he is very cruel. The plain through which we are riding now is broad and flat and bare. Low cone-shaped hills spring suddenly up here and there like ant hills on the level ground and in the distance there are crowds of them some higher and lost in the clouds, but all the same.

We have been up in the snow again and are now following the Sacramento River. We first caught sight of it rushing over it's rocky 3 bed nearly a thousand feet below us and by it the track along which we were to pass. We made a loop of four or five miles coming rapidly down the hillside and then crossed and recrossed the little stream seeking a way through the steep narrow valley. A few moments ago we were reated to what seemed to me quite a primitive cataract — the train stopped five minutes at a little pavillion to allow all who were athirst to take a drink of the mineral or side water that here gushes from the earth close by the river side and at the foot of some pretty idyllic falls called the Mosbraefalls. They hardly deserve the name of falls, being simply springs of water gushing from the high moss banks.

I have seen Shasta at last, at last, and I was the first of all in the car to see it. I could not believe my eyes at first it seemed like some mirage pictured high on the deep blue sky of early evening. Think what it was for me. All day long we had been watching and waiting

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for it, rejoicing in the hopes called forth by the bright morning, and growing more and more disappointed as the hours crept on and we journeyed ever nearer the great mountain and yet never caught the faintest suggestion of it. And then finally we gave it up entirely, descending the valley of the Sacramento we thought the intervening mountains shut off all possibility of one seeing it. And then the clouds gradually swept away and there was the clear blue sky. Shasta left behind and then suddenly as I was thinking of anything else there it burst suddenly on my view in all it's glorious majesty, gleaming white and pure and defined with razor-like sharpness against the blue evening sky without a cloud and not another mountain to mar it's glory. Talk 4 of Mt. Blanc, it is nothing in comparison, it is old and dirty and world and tourist worn beside this American mountain in all it's unspotted, untouched purity. As if loath to be lost sight of now it had finally in it's own mighty fashion swept the clouds from it as if they had never been, Shasta kept constantly in our view towering over mountains or filling up the space left bare as they fell away, ever grand and dazzlingly white and beautiful, oh if you could only see it too, you must come. I shall never be content until you do.

I am certain you will never read all this rhapsody but Papa says to send it. Excuse me but when I enjoy anything very much I feel as if I must tell you.

Much love to you and Mamma and my own little girls. I hope we may find letter in San Francisco tomorrow.

Lovingly, yours, May.